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Due Process and Property Rights Must Be Protected *Paul announces support of Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act*

WASHINGTON, DC -- To restore due process and protect property rights, U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (R, TX) said today he is cosponsoring H.R. 1658, the Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act, recently introduced by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde (R, IL). The legislation addresses the "gross abuses" of individual rights by law enforcement agencies at every level, and will likely come for a vote on the House floor next week. "The current system used in the seizure of private assets has become widely abused across our nation", said Dr. Paul, a long-time leader in Congress in the protection of individual's rights. "What started out as an attempt to curb large-scale crime and drug trafficking, has evolved into a corrupt system of intimidation. It is obvious that our current system fails to protect the holdings of minor offenders and innocent property owners from suspicious government law enforcement agents and their greedy hands. This legislation will restore the Bill of Rights' Fourth and Fifth Amendment guarantees to innocent property owners and put an end to the widespread abuse." H.R. 1658 would replace what has become a nightmarish situation for numerous Americans with just and equitable procedures. The allure of "easy money" for cash-strapped federal agencies has created a perverse incentive for agents to seize property and assets without regard for the innocence of the owner. All too often, even if a person is innocent of the crimes of which they were suspected, they never recover their seized property, said Rep. Paul. "It is not at all uncommon for an innocent individual, carrying or depositing a large amount of money, to have their cash confiscated because trace amounts of narcotics were detected. This, despite the fact FBI lab studies have shown that nearly all of our paper currency contains some traces of cocaine or other drugs on it", said Rep. Paul. The Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act restores the doctrine of the presumption of innocence by placing the burden of proof directly on the federal government before forfeiture can occur, and it stops the practice of guilt by association. No longer will innocent property owners, divorced spouses, or parents of drug-dependent children be subject to unreasonable search and seizures. "Currently, all possessions that are in any way linked to an alleged drug crime are subject to seizure or forfeiture: automobiles, homes, bank account, and so forth, without the government even proving the property owner was actually guilty of anything." The legislation also creates strict guidelines that require government agencies to notify individuals of the seizure within 60 days, and allows individuals up to 30 days after notification to appeal in district court for the immediate restoration thereof. Further, the bill creates a system of compensation, up to \$50,000, for property damages and loss of interest on assets due to forfeiture. Among the 57 House members Dr. Paul has joined in the bipartisan Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act are: U.S. Reps. Lamar Smith (R, TX), John Conyers, Jr. (D, MI), Philip Crane (R, IL), and Bob Barr (R, GA). Rep. Paul is encouraging his colleagues to support this important legislation.

